**2020 Syllabus for** “**Adventures in Stone Age Art and Archaeology”**

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This class explores European cave art, especially the art from painted caves in southwestern France and northern Spain. What are the limits of the evidence, and what can we learn from cave paintings? Do the paintings represent the spiritual world instead of daily life? What is the relationship between painted animals, shamanism, and subsistence? Did women create some of the paintings? Which caves were also used as meeting places and trade centers? Other topics will include portable art, the use of fire for lighting, heating, and cooking, and how people moved across the landscapes of early Europe and the Americas.

The topic was inspired by a National Geographic trip to the Paleolithic caves of France and Spain two years ago, and the instructor’s long-term interest in art and the materials analyses of what humans leave behind.

Week 1: **Life in Europe thousands of years ago and what archaeologists know (and cannot know) about a period long before written language.**

*Video: introduction to French caves* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjejoT1gFOc*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjejoT1gFOc)

French rock shelters and the invention of symbols

Caves of Pech Merle, Font de Gaume, Chauvet, and Lascaux

Week 2**: How do archaeologists date and interpret the earliest finds when so much of the evidence is missing?**

Lascaux (cont.)

The artist’s toolkit

Climate and subsistence (who invented fire?)

*Video on Neanderthals and Spanish cave paintings* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-ZOKOXBruo>

Altamira, Atapuerca, and early modern humans in Europe

Week 3:

**What is cognitive archaeology, and how can it be applied in an age before writing?**

*Video on symbol interpretation* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSF4zk2nsTU>

Shamanism and symbolism

Portable art and exploding Venuses

*Video on Venuses*

Cave women and children: what were their roles?

*Video on cave music*

Trade during the Paleolithic: the site of Isturitz

Week 4:

**Comparative examples of rock art from other countries (Indonesia, Australia, South America, Illinois)**

*Video: rock art from around the world* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1CGXy_h-iI>

How and why did people move around the landscape? Understanding migrations, e.g. the arrival of the First Americans

Summary: what is “primitive” art, and how does the earliest art help us understand what it is to be human?

(*note: this tentative schedule is subject to change, especially since some topics will take longer than others*)

**Suggested readings:**

# Paul Bahn, *The First Artists*: *In Search of the World's Oldest Art* (2017)

# Paul Bahn, *Cave Art: A Guide to the Decorated Ice Age Caves of Europe* (2007)

**Websites:**

donsmaps.com

*(note: this is an amazing but disorganized compendium of images and information compiled by an Australian archaeology enthusiast. Since we were not allowed to take photographs in most of the caves we visited in France and Spain, many of my Powerpoint images are taken from this site. Lots of other information here, but you must dig for it!*)

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(*I will post some images and links here as the semester progresses…)*